

A Needs Assessment: Cashiers, North Carolina

**The Community Fund of Cashiers
Western Carolina University**

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Executive Summary

-The needs assessment study included interviews with service providers, community leaders as well as a survey of the population of Cashiers.

-Concerns about out of control growth and development were the most important issues identified by the study.

-Concerns about the availability of affordable housing in Cashiers were expressed by all three groups.

-Concerns about the lack of leadership in Cashiers are a theme that emerged from the study.

Introduction

This needs assessment of the Cashiers Community was conducted in the summer and early fall of 2007. There have been two earlier needs assessments that were done, one in Jackson County as a whole and the other of Cashiers. In 2003, The Jackson County Department of Health conducted a community health assessment. It was designed to provide county level health information to the North Carolina Department of Health and Health Information. A questionnaire was sent to a sample of residents of Jackson County. Unfortunately, information was received from only thirteen households in Cashiers.

In 2006, The Cashiers Historical Society engaged a private firm to develop an interpretive planning project which included a community gathering involving 90 residents in August 2006. One of the issues raised at the gathering was a discussion of the characteristics of Cashiers that makes the community a distinctive place. The responses to that question included the natural beauty of the area, the small town feel, and the available of outdoor recreation. The people of Cashiers were described as friendly, neighborly, and giving of their time to make Cashiers a better place. The residents at the gathering were asked to name issues that were of general concern to the community. The responses included:

- Preserving the environment
- Community infrastructure
- Lack of official leadership
- Building community
- Rampant and insensitive development

Although the focus of this project was centered around developing a plan for the future of The Cashiers Historical Society, the information from this effort helped inform the Community Fund needs assessment.

The design of this needs assessment involved three sources of information. It was decided to interview individuals who were responsible for the delivery of government and private services to the citizens of Cashiers as well as individuals identified as community leaders in Cashiers. Additionally, information would be sought from the general population of Cashiers.

An interview schedule was developed to be used to gather information from the service providers and community leaders. Students from the Sociology program at Western Carolina University were recruited and trained in interviewing techniques.

The samples of both service providers and community leaders were chosen through a snowball sampling procedure. Since there is no definitive list of individuals in either group, people were selected and interviewed based on reputation and were asked at the end of the interview to provide names of other individuals who they thought should be included in the study. This process was done for each group separately. The interviews continued until the names suggested were already interviewed. In this way, 20 service providers and 12 community leaders were identified and interviewed. All the interviews were digitally recorded and stored in the computer.

The sample of the general population was drawn by private firm, Survey Sampling International. Initially the population was defined by households with a 743 telephone exchange and a 28717 zip code. This process yielded only 143 households. After consultation with SSI, the population was redefined as all households with a 743 telephone exchange but the zip codes were expanded to include Glenville and Sapphire in addition to Cashiers. This yielded 620 names and addresses, of which 432 were randomly sampled. The questionnaires were mailed out in early August. 110 were returned by the Post Office as undeliverable. 114 were completed and returned, of these, 94 were usable (10 were either blank or partially filled out). Therefore, the return rate was 38%, which is considered quite good.

Demographics

The best available demographic data is from the United States Census, but unfortunately is from 2000. The data are as follows:

Cashiers 2000 Census

Defined by 28717 zip code

Population	1537
Race	98% white
Employment	56.5% employed
Poverty	5.8% (individuals)
Home Value	\$258,300 (median)
Pop over 65	20.5%
Income	\$51,638 (median-family)
Age	49 (median)

Sample

Age	63 (median)
Income	\$53,100 (median)
Race	98.9% white
Sex	55.4% male
Homeownership	94.6%
Primary residence	66.7%
Year Round	64.1%
Education	62.9% college educated
Retired	53.9%

Included in the table are the statistics from the sample. It is clear that the sample does not perfectly reflect the population. Surveys generally result in respondents that are older, more educated and affluent and this is the case for the needs assessment sample. It is also interesting to note that the breakdown of full to part-time residents is 65% year round.

It should also be noted that the 2000 Census reports a population 1537 for the Cashiers zip code but only 196 for Cashiers proper. This is an important fact because the allocation of resources by the county and state are often based on population and the figures reported by the Census may be one reason that the residents of Cashiers feel that are shortchanged in terms of services and resources received by the Jackson County government.

The Assessment of Needs

The assessment of needs is presented by providing the means of each issue broken down by the three groups: service providers, community leaders, and the general population. The respondents were asked to rate the seriousness of each issue on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 is the most serious). The following table presents the mean (average) for each issue.

Means of Issue Areas for the Three Groups

Issues	Service Providers	Community Leaders	General Population
Law enforcement	3.9	5.75	5.62
Traffic	6.65	7.0	7.24
Comm. Inv.	3.05	3.58	3.82
Health Care	4.3	5.08	6.12
Pre-school Ed.	2.55	2.5	2.91
Recreation-youth	4.32	3.33	3.99
Waste Mgt.	2.68	4.83	5.68
Adult Ed.	3.3	2.83	4.11
Shop-services	5.65	4.58	5.93
Econ. Develop.	4.05	3.83	5.18
Roads	5.95	5.17	6.65
Environment	5.15	5.08	6.88
Elderly	4.17	3.5	4.73
TV Access	1.8	3.0	5.2
Housing Availability	7.45	6.92	6.15
Utilities-water	3.17	6.58	5.64
K-12 Education	5.42	4.92	5.34
Public Trans.	7.05	4.55	5.34
Internet Access	3.9	4.58	6.74
Housing Conditions	5.0	5.75	4.3
Employment	4.95	4.0	5.01
Housing Cost	8.4	8.3	7.01
Utilities-electric	2.3	2.8	3.91
Comm. Growth/plan	6.3	7.67	7.19
Population Growth	5.6	6.75	7.19
Green Space/Parks	4.5	4.08	5.73
Shop-goods	5.9	4.42	6.52
Recreation-adult	3.7	2.67	5.26
Sense of Community	3.75	4.25	4.45
Animal Services	2.05	2.5	4.68
Shop-food	3.45	2.5	4.91
Information Avail.	3.7	2.5	4.68
Crime	3.89	4.58	5.36
Health of People	4.11	5.0	4.8

Another way to show the assessment of needs is to rank order the issues from the highest to the lowest. This is presented for the three groups combined.

Combined

1 – housing cost	8.28
2 – housing availability	7.14
3 – traffic	6.69
4 – community growth & planning	6.48
5 – public transportation	6.41
6 – population growth	5.86
7 – shopping: goods	5.59
8 – roads	5.55
9 – environment	5.28
10 – shopping: services	5.24
11 – education: K-12	5.18
12 – housing: conditions	5.14
13 – employment	4.76
14 – health care	4.52
15 – green space/parks	4.45
16 – law enforcement	4.34
17 – health of people	4.32
18 – utilities: water	4.31
19 – internet access	4.14
20 – elderly	4.10
21 – crime	4.07
22 – sense of community	3.97
22 – economic development	3.97
24 – recreation: youth	3.86
25 – recreation: adult	3.41
26 – information availability	3.31
27 – community involvement	3.17
28 – education: adult	3.14
28 – shopping: foods	3.14
30 – waste management	3.00
31 – education: preschool	2.62
32 – utilities: electricity	2.41
33 – animal services	2.24
34 – TV access	2.21

As can be seen from the tables, the issues rated most serious include growth and development issues:

- Housing cost and availability
- Traffic
- Community growth and planning
- Roads
- Environment
- Population growth

There is general agreement among the three groups on these issues. The other most issue deals with shopping for goods. It also seems that the rapid growth experienced by Cashiers is of concern to the residents.

Another way to analyze the responses to the seriousness of the issue areas is to tally those issues that over 50% of the responses were at 5 or above. Looking at the data in this way shows that 5 of the issues were seen as serious by all three groups:

- Environment
- Housing availability
- Housing cost
- Community growth and planning
- Population growth

In this analysis, the data show that service providers saw shopping for services, roads, K-12 education, housing conditions, and shopping for goods as serious issues. The community leaders saw health care, waste management, utilities (water), and housing conditions as serious issues. The survey of the general population revealed that green space, internet access, economic development, unemployment, adult recreation, and crime as serious issues. Note that these issues for the three groups are in addition to the five issues listed above.

In general, the research suggests that the general population see more issues as serious problems than the service providers and community leaders.

Open ended Responses

The survey also allowed the respondents to offer their suggestions about issues facing Cashiers. Three open ended questions asked respondents to write in the biggest issue that Cashiers needs to work on, the issues that are handled best in Cashiers, and any issues that were not included in the survey. Although not all respondents provided answers to all three questions, approximately 60% took the time to write responses.

Issues handled well

Respondents said that community involvement and sense of community were both issues that are handled well in Cashiers. This fact bodes well for involving citizens in programs that are designed to improve the community.

Biggest issues

There were several issues that respondents thought were serious and wrote them on the survey. The issue most mentioned was control over growth and development followed by traffic congestion and affordable housing. Although all three issues were included on the survey, the fact that several (20) mentioned them suggests how important they are perceived by citizens.

Issues not included on the survey

Other issues suggested by the respondents included the lack of a downtown, more stores (chains and ABC in particular), and illegal immigrants. A handful of respondents wrote that the tax vs. services burden in Cashiers was high and that they felt ignored by the county government. Incorporation of Cashiers was mentioned by several respondents.

Full time and Part time Residents

There were some differences in the responses between full time and part time residents of Cashiers about the seriousness of the issues. Part time residents saw health care, shopping for services and goods, involvement, TV and internet access, and green space as more serious issues than full time residents. On the other hand the full time residents saw roads, housing availability, cost and conditions, K-12 education, employment, and population growth.

These differences reflect how different residents see their community. It is easy to see how shopping, TV and internet access, and health care might be perceived as more serious by the part time residents while concern for education, employment, and housing are seen as more serious by the full time resident.

Summary and Conclusions

There are some themes that emerged from the assessment of needs in Cashiers. The survey and interviews suggest:

Development Issues

Several of the items that referred to development resulted in high values, indicating problems. Population growth, traffic and congestion, community growth and planning were all identified as serious issues for Cashiers.

Leadership Issues

The comments that were made on the questionnaires included quite a few that referred to leadership issues. Control over development was the most common written comment followed by the idea that Cashiers should incorporate as a municipality.

Housing Issues

There were three issues listed on the survey and interview schedule that dealt with housing issues, and both cost and availability emerged as serious issues, although housing conditions were not seen as serious, it appears that affordable housing is an important problem in Cashiers.

All three of these issue areas also emerged from the interviews with service providers and community leaders. And, of course, these issues are interconnected. It appears that residents see growth and development as not being controlled by the village resulting in a deterioration of the physical environment and endangering the “feel” of Cashiers. This can be seen as a serious leadership problem.

These issues are going to be very difficult to resolve. Clearly, leadership within the Cashiers community needs to be developed and strengthened if these problems are to be addressed.

